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ABSTRACT

A study examined the beliefs that the deans/directors of continuing education had about the delivery of professional education programs through continuing education. Data were collected through a mailed questionnaire sent to 60 deans and directors of continuing education departments/divisions of universities and colleges that are members of Region IV of the National University Continuing Education Association. (Region IV covers Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin.) The questionnaire contained demographic items and 50 declarative statements about university/college policies about professional program faculty and student involvement in the delivery of credit courses through a continuing education system. Usable responses were returned by 39 members (a 65% response rate). Respondents represented a cross section of institutions in terms of size, with a substantial number of students involved in continuing education, strong indication of independent administration, and a sizeable involvement in regional center operations. Questionnaire items were divided into subsets for analysis. Results suggested that student services and institutional involvement in planning for courses were more significantly related to continuing education activity than were faculty preference, institutional pressures, or faculty rewards. Rewards for continuing education were not viewed as being readily available. Continuing education did not have its own faculty to deliver professional courses, and teaching in continuing education was not required by contract or agreement between the university and the faculty bargaining unit or senate. (YLB)

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CONTINUING EDUCATORS' ATTITUDES TOWARD PROFESSIONAL PROGRAM DELIVERY

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ABSTRACT

This study examined, through a mailed questionnaire, the perceptions of deans/directors of continuing education of universities and colleges which were members of Region IV of the National University Continuing Education Association. Region IV covers: Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio and Wisconsin. Continuing education was seen as a major activity for most respondents. Questionnaire items were divided into subsets for analysis which suggested that student services and institutional involvement in planning for courses were more significantly related to continuing education activity than were faculty preference, institutional pressures or faculty rewards. The study clarified some strengths and problems in continuing education.

PRESENTED AT

NUCEA REGION IV MEETING

MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA OCTOBER, 1986

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CONTINUING EDUCATORS' ATTITUDES TOWARD PROFESSIONAL PROGRAM DELIVERY

This is a report of a survey of deans and directors of continuing education departments/divisions of universities and colleges which were members of Region IV of the National University Continuing Education Association. It is based on data which was collected through a questionnaire which was mailed to each university or college.

Problem

The problem was to determine the beliefs that the deans/directors of continuing education had about the delivery of professional education programs through continuing education. Various experiences in continuing education and as faculty in a professional school generated questions about the relationship between continuing education and professional programs and the affect on delivery of courses. This study was designed to explore answers to those questions.

Method

A questionnaire containing demographic items and fifty declarative statements about university/college policies about professional program faculty and student involvement in the delivery of credit courses through a continuing education system was mailed to each of the sixty members of Region IV of NUCEA. Forty-five (75%) were returned of which thirty-nine (65%) were completed.

The demographic data were summarized by dividing respondents into size categories. Responses to each attitude item on the questionnaire were summed and percentages of the five optional answers of never, seldom, sometimes, frequently, and always were determined. Also, items were grouped together which focused on five subthemes in the questionnaire. Responses to the items in each theme were summed and correlated with demographic data. Questionnaire scores were used for a statistical analysis, both individually and grouped according to demographic variables.

Two definitions were provided at the beginning of the questionnaire:

Continuing education - credit courses offered by the university which are delivered through the continuing education department, at either on or off campus sites.

Professional program - a series of credit courses which are degree related offered by a professional school or department.

Literature Review

The literature base regarding the relationship between continuing educators and professional educators is only now developing. As Cross (1981) suggests, the research base of organized instruction is primarily surveys and census data. Adult education studies focus largely on stage and age related concepts which affect learning and motivation. One point which emerges clearly is the need to reduce threat as it correlates with low self esteem and a tendency to drop out. Professional program

faculty could learn this and other significant items related to adult learners by closer association with continuing educators. However, opportunity for this interaction has not been prevalent.

"Educationally, continuing professional education is an infant. Following enthusiastic beginnings after world war II continuing professional education is barely into a confused, if expansive, second period in its development, whether viewed comparatively or from the point of view of any given profession" (Stern, 1981, p 9). Stern raises other pragmatic questions about continuing professional education such as: what should be the role of the professional society as provider and regulator; what role does private enterprise have; and, what is the public interest.

Shimberg (1983) discussed the nature of competence and the responsibility of continuing professional education to organize a system which provides the knowledge, skill, and ability which may be tested, through licensing or certification requirements, at a minimum level of competency. This raises questions about how continuing education should be organized and implies the necessity of an effective working relationship between continuing education and professional education.

Cruse (1983, p 59) comments that: "the instructor is a key ingredient in the learning process," suggesting that the continuing professional educator should have the knowledge, skill and ability which enables him/her to teach the professional content. This calls for a knowledge of adult learning styles and a competency

in adult education, part of which could be achieved through a relationship with continuing education persons. On the other hand Griffith (1981, p 67) points out that "professional competency must be assessed, not against an ideal standard created by academics, but by the standard representative of ever-changing current practice." Implicit here is a third role for a continuing professional educator, that of the practicing professional who may provide input to the educational program through advisory councils, part-time teaching, or as a field instructor for professional practice curricula. This tripartite arrangement is one in which professional educators may play a significant role rather than turning continuing professional education over to business oriented, non-educational enterprise.

Derbyshire (1983) makes the point that certain providers of continuing professional education are unacceptable. For him the possession of a professional academic degree does not automatically make a person a great teacher. However, many individuals have jumped into continuing professional education with few credentials or qualifications and are inappropriate.

In other professional occupations, such as banking and real estate, there are educational needs which are either difficult for educational institutions to meet because of the diversity involved or because academic faculty are insufficiently experienced or interested in providing the content. This suggests a different role for continuing professional educators and supports the notion

that industries may hire highly trained professional people to deliver programs as part of ongoing staff development. The role of the academic becomes quite obscure in this configuration.

A somewhat alternative point of view was expressed by Hohmann (1981) who commented on a professional association's role in continuing education by pointing out that associations are often poorly organized in planning and delivering continuing education programs. She comments too about the fact that little is known about cooperative relationships between continuing educators and professional associations. She cited a study by NUEA (now NUCEA) and ASAE which focused on the process of sponsorship of non-degree continuing education but which didn't examine degree related continuing professional education.

Gordon (1981) presented some observations about continuing education in universities and colleges which are relevant to this study. The characteristics of continuing education programs which were identified in this study as "pace setters" and "comers" were: 1) they were relatively free of academic and administrative rules and regulations; 2) they were committed to public service, providing education to those who otherwise would be unable to enrole; 3) they have few entrance requirements so students prove, after admission rather than before, that they can do the work; 4) they are primarily teaching, and not research, institutions; 5) they seek faculty support for programs which pay some attention to the special needs of adults; and, 6) the professional staff

tend to be composed of people who see their primary function as integrating theory and practice.

An additional idea in the literature concerned the increasing interest of university administrators in continuing education departments. This "new" interest stems from the realization that continuing education students represent a large market, at a time when declines in enrollment are either a reality or are forboding. This has a significant implication for continuing educators and professional program faculty to get together in a more organized way to plan and deliver programs.

Perhaps an approach that would strengthen the linkage between continuing education and professional programs is the advancement of adult education as a profession in its own right. Knowles (1965) several years ago expressed an optimism about this development and currently many universities are employing people in continuing education with credentials in adult education curricula. This development could certainly interface neatly with the professional status of professional program faculty and promote some interesting blends in the developing of continuing professional education. In one way this idea may be seen to have potential in what could be produced by greater cooperation between continuing educators and professional program faculty. For example, Houle (1980) discussed professionalization as a process leading to the completion of a profession's mission. Conceptualizing continuing professional education like this could call for an improved exchange

of ideas among continuing educators and educators from the professions who could combine common elements of various professions to organize continuing professional education better and to sharpen the definitions of roles for each group in planning and delivery. In other sections of his book Houle addresses the difficulty of this merger but does not seem to advise that it couldn't be accomplished. He does make clear that since the 1960's when professions came under attack that the need to demonstrate continuing competence in a professional field has been manifest. Continuing professional education is a primary avenue through which this goal can be reached.

A study of professional program faculty by Toombs, Lindsay, and Hettinger (1985) suggests that "institutionalizing" continuing professional education as a part of the academic core of the university may not be very easy to achieve. Certain aspects of continuing professional education involvement are viewed as significant, i.e. research and publication, while others, i.e. service, are not so appealing. It was clear that faculty did not see continuing education as having its own faculty and that suggests some conceptual distance between continuing education and professional program teaching.

While many research oriented faculty may have a negative view of continuing education "both continuing educators and research oriented faculty have important roles in the development of continuing education programming" (Vicere, 1985). However, these roles were developed due to the perceived lack of recognition given to continuing

education in promotion and tenure reviews (Vicere, 1984). This latter item was part of the study which is reported here.

Demographic Responses

Each respondent was asked to report: number of undergraduate and graduate students; number of students in continuing education; size of the community in which the university/college was located; number of faculty; whether the continuing education division/department was independently administered; number of board appointed faculty on the continuing education staff; number of staff in regional centers; and, year the continuing education program started.

Of the thirty-nine respondents who answered these items six had less than 4,000 undergraduates; ten had between 4,001 and 10,000; seven had between 10,001 and 16,000; and, twelve had more than 16,000. Thirty-six responded regarding graduate students. Four had less than 500 graduates; four had from 501 and 1,000; three had 1,001 to 1,500; four from 1,501 to 2,000; eleven from 2,001 to 5,000; and ten over 5,000. Thus, sixteen of thirty-nine reported an undergraduate population of 10,000 or less, while twenty-one of thirty-six reported a graduate population of more than 2,001.

Regarding the number of students in continuing education thirty-seven responded and reported that: five had 1,000 or less; seventeen had 1,001 to 5,000; six had 5,001 to 10,000; and, nine had over 10,000.

Thirty-three responded about the size of the community in which they were located and indicated: three in a community of less than 10,000; five between 10,001 and 25,000; five between 25,001 and 50,000; four between 50,001 to 100,000; seven 100,001 to 500,000 and, nine over 500,000. Looking at these data in summary seventeen were in communities of less than 100,000 while sixteen were in communities of more than that number.

Thirty-four respondents reported on the total number faculty that: eleven had from 101 to 500; eleven had from 501 to 900; three had 901 to 1,500; and nine more than 1,500. Thus sixty-five percent had fewer than 900 faculty, thirty-five percent more than 900, and twenty-six percent more than 1,500.

Of thirty-seven cases, thirty-four indicated the administration of continuing education was independent of other departments while three indicated this was not the case. Eleven departments/divisions reported they had board appointed faculty while twenty-six did not. Of those which had board appointed faculty four had less than five, three from six to ten and four more than ten. Twelve institutions reported they had regional centers with staff. Of these, two had less than five staff, two had six to ten, and eight had more than ten.

Thirty-five responded to the question about number of years of operation. Two were established within the last ten years, twelve between eleven and twenty years, four between twenty-one to thirty years and, seventeen more than thirty years. In summary,

sixty percent of those who responded were established more than twenty-one years ago and about half of them more than thirty years.

Mean Scores

The scores on questionnaire items were totaled for each respondent and the mean and standard deviation were determined for each cluster of respondents in each size category. For the entire questionnaire the mean score for all respondents was 152.231 on a range from 119 to 193 with a standard deviation of 15.665. The median was 152. The item alpha reliability coefficient was .8055. The numbers suggest that respondents viewed behaviors described in the questionnaire as occurring between "sometimes" and "frequently." There wasn't a strong positive response however as several scores were more toward "seldom."

For the ten institutions with between 4,001 and 10,000 undergraduates the mean score on the whole questionnaire was 152.7 and the standard deviation was 9.66. The mean score for the whole respondent group on the variable of "number of undergraduate students" was 153 and the standard deviation 15.8. This is cited as an example and the data on the remaining demographic variables did not suggest that responses were significantly different, although there were some individual high and low scores in some subsets. These situations could be studied more closely to discover, if possible, why the differences in score responses occurred. Caution is suggested however, since in some cases the number of institutions involved was small.

Mean Scores On Grouped Items

Some items in the questionnaire seemed to have similar content so for analysis they were grouped into five sections: faculty preferences for teaching continuing education; institutional pressures to offer continuing education courses; faculty rewards for continuing education teaching; institutional planning for continuing education courses; and, student services as a part of continuing education course delivery.

For the faculty preference items, which concerned preference and interest for teaching continuing education courses, the mean score was 10.7 in a range from four to twenty. For those items concerning institutional pressure to offer continuing education courses from the faculty organization, professional program deans/directors, policies of continuing education division/department and professional programs, organizational expectations, faculty assignments to continuing education, contract requirements and university policy, the mean score was 23.75 in a range from nine to forty-five. The items about faculty rewards concerned: compensation, tenure, promotion, status and prestige. The mean score was 14.8, on a range from five to twenty five. For all of these groups of items responses were about at "sometimes" level. For the student services items, which concerned: equipment and library materials availability, evening hours for continuing education offices, advising, concern for non-traditional students, university privileges and special recognition for continuing education students,

the mean score was 26.66 on a range from eight to forty. Regarding institutional planning, the items were: the personality of the continuing education dean/director, needs assessment studies, off-campus offerings, cooperation between continuing education and professional program faculty, and the university mission statement. The mean score was 25.27, on a range from seven to thirty-five. For both groups of variables the responses occurred more at "frequently."

Response To Questionnaire Items

The answers to individual items, when viewed from the perspective of a curve of distribution and using the median statistic, formed a figure slightly skewed to the positive, suggesting somewhat more than "sometimes" as a response, with nineteen items marked "frequently" and eighteen "sometimes". This slight tendency toward a positive view was balanced by the occurrence of eight "seldom" and two "never" responses. There was only one "always."

One way to present the highlights of data relating to questionnaire items is to consider the items together which received the same response. The item which "always" was the median response referred to the university mission statement including some reference to providing continuing professional education courses. The mean score on this item was 3.923 as there were five "never," two "seldom," five "sometimes," six "frequently" and, twenty-one "always" responses. This suggested that the basis for continuing education for professional program was put in place although a question about the implementation of the mission statement has to be raised since the scores on

other items about implementation were not strong.

Frequently Response

The cluster of items to which "frequently" was the response related to: faculty compensation, the working relationship between the department/division of continuing education and professional programs, planning and offering courses only when a need for them has been determined, faculty interest in teaching continuing education, offering courses off-campus, control of continuing education offerings totally in the hands of the dean/director of continuing education, continuing education responsibility for physical arrangements, instructional support services, notice of courses, off-campus student registration, library materials and their availability, attending to non-traditional students' needs, freedom of program faculty to refuse teaching continuing education and, providing the same university privileges for continuing education students as those admitted to professional programs.

Regarding extra compensation, off-campus offerings, continuing education staff making physical arrangements, and faculty freedom to reject involvement in continuing education, responses were more positive as reflected by mean scores for each being above 4.0 on a scale of 1.0 to 5.0. On the other hand mean scores for items about new course offerings only with a determination of need, dean/directors' control of continuing education course offerings, cooperative planning between continuing education and professional programs, were less than 4.0.

The percentages of "always" and "sometimes" responses to some of these items may help to clarify the response. For example, 43.6% responded "always" regarding extra compensation for teaching continuing education courses while 33.3% responded "sometimes" to new course offerings being based on the determination of need. In other words "frequently" was an average response and there were usually one third "sometimes" or "always" responses and not much centrality.

Sometimes Responses

The items which received a "sometimes" response concerned; preference for continuing education teaching assignments; deans and department heads encouraging continuing education teaching; decision making regarding course offerings based on the personality of the dean/director of continuing education; written policy regarding professional departments offering continuing education courses; professional faculty assignment to teach continuing education; needs assessments regarding professional courses; professional departments' understanding of continuing education needs of community practitioners; continuing education dean/director's rejection of a professional faculty for continuing education courses; adequate financing for continuing education courses; computer availability; availability of academic advising; professional faculty teaching continuing education courses as a part of load; appointment of a special faculty to coordinate the delivery of continuing education courses; the importance of continuing education income to the

universitys' operating budgets; university policy regarding hiring community practitioners as adjunct professors; the importance of practitioners as adjunct professors; the importance of continuing education in the university decision making process and, the reliance of professional programs on continuing education to deliver their programs to students.

Again the "sometimes" response was influenced by the number of other responses. For example, regarding the influence of the personality of the dean/director of continuing education on decisions to offer continuing education courses there were fourteen (35.9%) "frequently" responses while for financial allocations for professional continuing education there was a bimodal response with thirteen (33.3%) "seldom" and ten (25.6%) "frequently" responses on either side of eight (20.5%) "sometimes" responses. Regarding availability of advising thirteen (33.3%) responded "frequently"; for the item on faculty teaching continuing education as part of load there were eight (20.5%) "seldom" and seven (17.9%) "never" responses; a formal university policy of offering continuing education courses to professional and community practitioners yielded a frequency distribution of scores more evenly spread across the response categories with eight (20.5%) "never," nine (31%) "seldom," seven (17.9%) "sometimes," six (15.4%) "frequently" and, five (12.8%) "always"; and, employment of adjuncts for continuing education courses was spread over the three middle responses with eleven (28.2%) answering "seldom," thirteen (33.3%) "sometimes" and,

ten (25.6%) "frequently."

Seldom Responses

These nine items received a median "seldom" response: faculty organization, i.e. bargaining unit or faculty senate, promoting teaching of continuing education courses; requiring professional programs to offer continuing education courses; teaching continuing education courses relating to tenure and promotion decisions; teaching in continuing education yielding informal rewards; continuing education faculty involvement in off-campus registration of students; evening hours for continuing education departments; textbook sales being handled by faculty; and, special recognition for graduates of continuing education programs.

Here too percentages of responses to the other optional answers affected the median response. For example, regarding a faculty organization's promoting teaching in continuing education there were ten (25.6%) "never" with seventeen (43.6%) "seldom" responses; there were sixteen (41%) "never" with eleven (28.2%) "seldom" responses for requiring professional programs to offer continuing education courses; fourteen (35.9%) "sometimes" with fifteen (38.5%) "seldom" responses regarding continuing education as a basis for tenure; twelve (30.8%) "sometimes" with nineteen (48.7%) "seldom" responses regarding continuing education as a basis for promotion. Regarding an informal reward system thirteen (33.3%) responded "sometimes" and twenty-one (53.8%) "seldom." In eleven (28.2%) situations faculty were "sometimes" expected to handle registrations

of off-campus students while twelve (30.8%) responded "seldom." The median response to evening hours for continuing education departments was "seldom" yet 30% responded "frequently" or "always." The "seldom" response for faculty handling textbook sales was the median yet 43% responded "sometimes" or "frequently." The number of responses regarding special recognition for continuing education graduates was eleven (28.2%) for both "seldom" and "sometimes."

Never Responses

Two items received "never" median responses: continuing education having its own faculty who deliver professional courses; and, teaching in continuing education being required by contract or agreement between the university and the faculty bargaining unit or senate. For the former the response was strongly "never" as thirty (76.9%) gave that answer. For the latter twenty-five (64.1%) responded "never" while eight (20.5%) responded "seldom."

Summary And Conclusions

A review of the demographic data may help to conceptualize an image of the population of institutions from which responses were received.

There was a mix of size among the group with about half being smaller and half larger than 10,000 undergraduate students while twenty-one (58%) of those reporting had more than 2,000 graduates. The number of continuing education students reported for seventeen institutions was more than 1,000 and for another fifteen more than 5,000, suggesting that continuing education was a major activity

for most of them. There was an indication of support for this conclusion in that twenty-three (59%) responded "sometimes," "frequently," or "always" to an item in the questionnaire about income from continuing education courses being a vital part of the university's operating budget.

About half of those reporting indicated a location in a community of less than 100,000 population with half of them indicating location in a community of less than 25,000. Nine reported being in a community of more than 500,000.

These data were analyzed for a relationship between size and response to questionnaire items and there were no significant difference in response. Further analysis was not done as the demographic data was not gathered in a discrete enough format to highlight differences.

Thirty-four of the respondents indicated continuing education was separately administered as a division/department. About thirty-eight percent had board appointed faculty in the continuing education division/department and about the same number had regional centers as a part of their operation. Among those with regional centers two thirds had more than ten regional center staff. Sixty percent of the continuing education programs reporting had been operating more than thirty years.

In summary, those reporting represented a cross section of institutions in terms of size, with a substantial number of students involved in continuing education, strong indication of independent

administration, and a sizeable involvement in regional center operations.

Regarding questionnaire items there were only slight differences among the perceptions of the institutions reporting. The mean score for respondents was 152.2 and the median 152. There was a standard deviation of 15.7 and a range between 119 and 193. The distribution was skewed slightly to the positive so that if one considered the measuring instrument as having enough internal consistency for total scores to be useful then the content of the items could be viewed as occurring somewhat more than "sometimes."

Dividing the responses to questionnaire items into subsets for analysis yielded the suggestion that faculty preference, institutional pressures, and faculty rewards for continuing education involvement were "sometimes" involved, while student services and institutional involvement in planning for continuing education, were more "frequently" a factor in teaching continuing education courses. Although the number of items in the subsets was small these data may be useful in suggesting further studies.

The "always" response occurred with only one item on the questionnaire, that regarding the university mission statement including a reference to providing continuing education. Regarding the "frequently" responses, which mostly concerned the delivery role of continuing education, faculty compensation, and continuing education student recognition, the responses were quite positive, especially regarding compensation and working relationships. There

were indications of perceived weaknesses in some areas, i.e. need determination for courses; cooperative planning; the availability of library materials; and continuing education student recognition.

The "sometimes," "seldom," and "never" responses may raise questions about action which could be taken to increase positive views. For example, financial allocations to continuing education were not seen as sufficient by a third of the respondents with another 20% responding "sometimes" to that item. Also, in fewer instances was there a formal university policy regarding offering continuing education courses. About one third reported that teaching continuing education was either "seldom" or "never" a part of load, suggesting that for two thirds of the faculty that it was.

In general, rewards for continuing education were not viewed as being readily available. There was little structural support for encouraging involvement and twenty-five percent responded "never" regarding the faculty organization promoting continuing education teaching. Tenure and promotion were viewed as "seldom" being related to continuing education. While the view of faculty "seldom" being involved in textbook sales or in registration of off-campus students was reported, there was a view too that "seldom" was there any informal rewards for continuing education, that continuing education students received special recognition or that there were evening hours for continuing education programs.

The "never" responses concerned only two items, one referring to continuing education having its own faculty and the second

referring to teaching in continuing education being required by contract or agreement between the university and the faculty bargaining unit or faculty senate. Either one of these items may have the potential to yield positive results if some action can be taken to place faculty in continuing education division/departments or if the faculty organization can come to a more formal agreement with the universities concerning the offering of continuing education courses.

This study has highlighted some views of continuing education division/department directors toward the delivery of professional education courses in continuing education. The data suggested that there were some areas where changes might be made which could result in a more positive view of continuing education and its delivery system.

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